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ABSTRACT

This report asserts that the institutionalization of scholarship, namely research and professional development is essential to the future success of community colleges. However, at two-year institutions, there is no systematic planning or budgetary network for such activities, and the obstacles to performing research are many, including limited access to research materials, lack of support from colleagues, and lack of time. Two-year colleges must restructure their priorities to foster an environment of research and scholarship. They must adopt a new system that provides faculty time to pursue activities that enhance teaching and that institutionalizes such activities. The terms, research and scholarship must be redefined to encompass many activities that are already being performed at community colleges. Such expansion of these terms will favorably change the reputation of community colleges as institutions of higher learning and research. (EMH)

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Scholarship in the Community

College System

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Abstract

The perception that community college faculty does not conduct *research* is, to a large extent, unjustified. At the same time that not all faculty at four year institutions engage in scholarly pursuits, in the community college, the obstacles are more difficult to overcome. Not only teachers in two year colleges have heavier teaching loads, but they also teach needier students without the help of teaching assistants. They also lack the clerical support for the typing of manuscripts. Mostly, however, they get little support, encouragement and rewards from the college administration and their peers. Yet, much more credit would be given to the *research* conducted by community college faculty if the term *research* were broadened to encompass many of the exciting activities that go on at the community college, and with increased frequency.

Scholarship in the Community College System

Introduction

From the very beginning, community colleges have performed a distinctive role within the American educational system. Because of their open policy admissions, low cost and the myriad of different courses and programs offered, they enjoy a unique status among educational institutions. The features that distinguish the two year colleges also happen to be their strongest traits. Community colleges fulfill their mission by responding to the needs of the community. Their sister organizations -- the four year universities -- perform a somewhat different role, which sometimes overlaps but most often complements that of community colleges. There are also many important differences. Yet, efforts to maintain excellence in the delivery of instruction need not and should not eliminate the differences among these institutions. If they are to continue to successfully fulfill their mission, community colleges must continue to search for answers as to what they do, what should they do, how should they do it, and what is unique about them. The comparative advantage notion, so popular among economists, can also be applied to educational institutions: strong productivity and efficiency gains can be derived from specialization.

This paper will argue that the institutionalization of *scholarship* is essential to the future of community colleges, if they are to succeed. Although it has been said (Williams, 1991) that community college faculty may have been reluctant to intrude on the research "territory" of university professors, not all *research* is created equal. There certainly is a niche for community colleges in that arena. Furthermore, only through the

undertaking of some form of *research* will two year colleges be able to survive and thrive in a fast changing world. Cohen and Brawer (1996) make the point that community college teachers are limited in the variety of courses that they are allowed to teach, being restricted to freshman and sophomore levels. To offset that, and to avoid "burn out," it is imperative that the educator's creative juices find an outlet through which they can continue to flow. *Scholarship* provides that opportunity. The excitement of research can keep the teacher invigorated, as well as up to date and in touch with new developments in the fast changing world of education. Developing a new course, devising a novel approach to a syllabus, giving a talk or any other systematic process or creative activity can do wonders to combat boredom and to strengthen teaching.

In this paper, I will also show that *research* and *scholarship* occur with increased frequency, more than it may seem at first glance. In 1990, Kember and Gow conducted an ERIC search of "action research" and "higher education" and found only 74 entries. I conducted the same search and obtained 372 documents only seven years later!!! I will reiterate what has become a consensus in the literature: we must redefine the terms *research* and *scholarship*, to encompass many activities that are already being undertaken in community colleges. Vaughan has strongly expressed the opinion, in several of his articles, that such expansion of the term scholarship would have the added benefit of favorably changing the reputation of community college as institutions of higher learning. Finally, I will provide some suggestions at to possible resources and avenues for faculty wishing to engage in *scholarship*, as well as detail some promising topics for *research*.

The terms *scholarship, research and professional development* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. They will encompass -- but not be limited to -- any activity that advances knowledge of the subject or the discipline; that integrates two or more disciplines; that fulfills pragmatic needs by having applications; or that enhances pedagogy.

The State of Scholarship in the Community College System

The consensus throughout the literature is that community colleges do not conduct as much research as four year university professionals do. At two year institutions, there is no systematic planning or budgetary network for such activities while the obstacles are many. Those obstacles include limited access to research materials, lack of support, encouragement and rewards from the institution and colleagues, but most of all, lack of time. However, community college settings can be a fertile ground of unique opportunities for those willing to overcome such considerable constraints.

Lack of time is attributed to be the single greatest challenge to the undergoing and implementation of professional development. I conducted an informal survey among a few faculty members who have recently published. The results consistently show that individuals must use their *own* time if they choose to conduct research and publish. As one professor remarked: "I don't "find "time to publish. I make time, usually after 11:30 at night, on Saturdays and Sundays and during the summer. In a sense, it is my "free time," my recreation, and I do it because I enjoy it... I have tried to get release time and funds from the college, but have never been successful." (Baer, 1997) A recent study sponsored by the US Department of Education confirms that assertion. Data compiled

showed that the workload for community college faculty could be described as follows: Full timers work on average 46.6 hours per week. The majority of time was allocated to teaching (67 percent), 4.5 percent for research, 9.2 percent for administrative work, and about 19 percent for other activities. (1992-93 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty).

My faculty survey uncovered an additional obstacle to scholarship in the community college, and that is the fact that many teachers do not have doctorates and the skills to conduct research. The same study finds that the majority of the faculty had a Master's degree (61 percent) and only 15.5 percent held a doctorate's degree or professional equivalent. Furthermore, community colleges lack the secretarial and clerical support that is essential for typing and manuscript preparation, activities that are time consuming, yet essential parts of conducting research.

Types of Scholarship and Research Currently Being Conducted in Community Colleges

The view that community colleges are somewhat "inferior" to universities has often been expressed in the literature. That inferiority is attributed to the "lack" of research on the part of community college faculty. It is unfortunate that this narrow view ignores all of the creative, innovative and dynamic teaching that is the trademark of the community college. To be sure, *research* could and should be expanded, but for that to happen, many institutional changes must be implemented.

According to Vaughan (1991), an increasing number of community college faculty is engaged in applied classroom research. He believes that, if the definition of scholarship were broadened to include book reviews, annotated bibliographies, outside lectures,

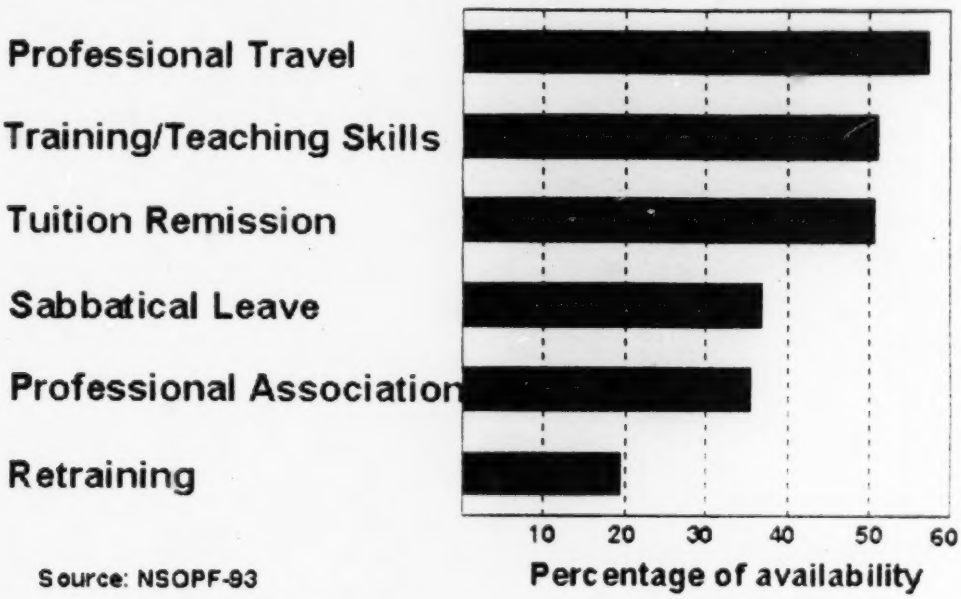
review of existing research, or speeches, the "community college faculty would be given credit for many of the scholarly activities in which they now engage." Other authors and educators have advocated even more liberal definitions of scholarship. Pellino, Blackburn and Boberg (1984) identified the following possible dimensions of scholarship: professional activity; research publication; artistic endeavor; engagement with novel ideas; community services; pedagogy

"Action Research" is one of the more recent buzzwords mentioned in the writings of many educators. The concept is not new, however. Some authors trace it as far back as the early works of John Dewey in the 1920s. It is gaining momentum as a type of research uniquely tailored to the needs of the community college. Action research can be defined as a systematic process of studying one's own practice to find answers and practical solutions to pragmatic problems. Many writers have documented the personal and professional impact of action research and it seems to be significantly positive. Teachers engaging in such activities become more critical and reflective, thus, better able to identify possible avenues for change in their current methodologies. The beauty of such approach is enhanced by the pragmatic nature of such tasks. The impetus for the research is found in the problems identified by the teachers themselves. The possibilities are vast. One could identify problems in the curriculum, in the discipline, or in the methodology used. In any case, the research becomes a catalyst for an evaluation of the current status quo to determine the possibility or the necessity for change. What makes this approach intriguing is the possibility of merging self-assessment with action research. One would be simultaneously engaged in the process of identifying the needs,

designing the process and evaluating the outcomes. McKay (1992) describes the following steps in the process of conducting action research: 1. Identification of the issue or problem; 2. Compilation and gathering of data; 3. Devising of a plan; 4. Implementation of the plan, 6. Evaluation of the results. The process may turn out to be cyclical as one uses the same steps to then analyze the results from the first cycle.

Institutional Changes that Could Foster More Research

The graph depicted below shows the availability of funding for professional development, by categories. (1992-93 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty).



Source: NSOPF-93

The consensus in the literature is that institutions need to restructure their priorities if an atmosphere of research and scholarship is to be fostered. The 1994 National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) published a report titled Prisoners of Time. In that report, several conclusions emerged that might shed some light on what the future of education entails. The report indicates that more and more

will be expected of teachers, both in quantity and complexity of knowledge. At the same time, the current average age of a two-year faculty is 47, with ages ranging from 21 to 91 years old. Not only currently "graying" teachers need time to understand new concepts simply to keep up with the frenzied pace of new technologies (the hot issue in education at present), but they also need time to plan and conduct their own professional development. A conflict arises because budgetary concerns drive teaching loads increasingly higher, yet the number of hours in a day stubbornly remains twenty-four. Predictably, the new push for higher levels of scholarship may have a better chance to become a reality as the current wave of faculty retires and is replaced by younger and more technology literate individuals. Supposedly, the new teachers will not require as much time to learn new skills, thus freeing up more opportunities for research.

Some steps are necessary to foster an atmosphere of *research and scholarship* in the community college system. Not only the new system will require that faculty is granted some reassigned time to pursue such activities but, more importantly, there needs to be an institutionalization of those activities. However, strict requirements for scholarly *research* are not necessarily the answer. Educators in the community college should not be forced to undergo the pressure for "publish or perish" that is so common at the university level. Being forced to publish has not always led to relevant or productive research. Instead, activities that enhance teaching -- be them published or not -- should become a priority when performance evaluation times come.

The Prisoners of Time report (1994) also acknowledges the inflexibility of the schedule that institutions impose on faculty. More damaging, in my opinion, is the

failure to view *professional development, scholarship or research* as integral parts of one's teaching. Without exception, all of the faculty members that I have surveyed maintained that the motivation for their research was the hope that it would lead them to be better and more productive teachers. That motivation ranked much higher than the pursuit of the glamour involved in seeing one's name in print.

Community colleges need to begin promoting a climate of encouragement and reward for *scholarship and research* and such activities should start with administrators conducting such activities, and then spilling over to staff and faculty. Parilla (1986) goes as far as suggesting that *scholarship* become an integral part of the criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure. This will only happen when changes are implemented in the culture of the college and in its reward system. Administrators must support and reinforce faculty's efforts to conduct *research.* They need to recognize that *professional development* is an intrinsic part of the productivity of the teacher in the classroom. Teacher learning must be viewed as an on going process.

To conclude, community colleges need not strive to compete with four year universities. Each has its own mission to fulfill. Jan Ignash (1992) correctly states that "Four year institutions need to realize their debt to community colleges and to start to regard them as equal partners in the process of providing higher education to the nation's adults. Community colleges take pressure for admission off the baccalaureate institutions. They also provide services for special populations of students which four year institutions are not always well equiped to handle."

It is only fitting that the different purposes embodied in the mission statements of both types of institutions are reflected in the types of *research* that are conducted by their respective teachers. Community college faculty, for the most part, love and indeed excel in the teaching aspect of the profession. It is natural that they choose to channel their *scholarship* towards enhancing their teaching skills. Community colleges must often perform under less than optimal constraints, serving an increasingly diverse population, who have many critical needs. Their *research* will reflect the pragmatic needs of such environment. What needs to be changed is the perception that such *research* is somehow "inferior" compared to the "pure" *research* that four year institutions claim to undertake.

Possible Avenues for Publication

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education accepts submissions of research reports, scholarly papers, position papers, manuals, handbooks, course syllabi, conference papers, etc. for inclusion in the education database. These papers are subject to evaluation and selection by subject experts. For information, contact eriche@www.gwu.edu or 1-800-773-3742.

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has a 1996-1997 College Research Agenda that encompasses five broad areas, to include Student Success, Future Scanning, Demographic Profile, Financial Resources, Value Added to the Community. In addition, they request that the impact of changing technology on community colleges and students be included whenever appropriate. For more details, access http://www.aacc.nche.edu/research/agenda.htm

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education is in the midst of conducting a national study on the quality and content of higher education literature. To become a part of the project, e-mail or fax the request. The information can be accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~eriche/Research/

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education has been publishing the ASHE-ERIC Report Series Catalog since 1973. They also accept manuscripts. Information can be found by accessing http://www.gwu.edu/~eriche/Reports

Jossey-Bass publishers offer an opportunity to publish in their bi-monthly *On the Horizon*, which draws on the expertise of contributors from a variety of disciplines. To

find information on how and where to submit manuscripts, access

http://horizon.unc.edu/horizon/

Organizations Concerned with Community College Research

American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036
http://www.aacc.nche.edu

American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges
Mott Community College
1401 East Court Street
Flint, MI 48503

Association of Community College Trustees
1740 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Center for the Study of Community Colleges
1749 Mandeville Lane
Los Angeles, CA 90049

Community College Consortium
311 School of Education Building
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

Community College Humanities Association
Essex County College
303 University Avenue
Newark, NJ 07102

Community College Leadership Program
University of Texas at Austin
College of Education, EDB 348
Austin, TX 78712-1293

ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges
3051 Moore Hall
University of California
Los Angeles, CA 90024
email: eeh3usc@mvs.oac.ucla.edu

League for Innovation in the Community College
26522 La Alameda, suite 370
Mission Viejo, CA 92691

Journals and Periodicals:

Community College Journal
American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW, suite 410
Washington, DC 20036

Community College Journal of Research and Practice
Taylor & Francis, Publishers
1010 Vermont Avenue, NW, suite 200
Washington, DC 20005

Community College Review
Box 7801
Raleigh, NC 27695-7801

Community College Times
American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW, suite 410
Washington, DC 20036

Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges
Central Virginia Community College
3506 Wards Road
Lynchburg, VA 24502
email: cvcoffs%vccscent.bitnet@vtbit.cc.vt.edu

Journal of Applied Research in the Community College
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University
331 DeGarmo Hall
Normal, IL 61761-5900

New Directions for Community Colleges
Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers
350 Sansome Street
San Francisco, CA 94104

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